



# Office Gossip

## The Filing Cabinets Are Listening

### *Friendly Banter and Nasty Rumors in the Workplace*

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." No one knows who said it first, but it reflects a truth that is practically universal: We all need an occasional break to recharge our mental batteries. One popular way to achieve this is to take a couple of minutes for banter with colleagues.

A little friendly office chitchat can add variety to stressful routines. It can cement personal ties that foster productive collaboration. But rumor-mongering can also be very damaging - not just to those who are gossiped about, but also to those doing the talking, and to the entire enterprise.

### Conversation, Reputation, Litigation

Obviously, long personal conversations remove time from work and reduce productivity. And malicious or irresponsible workplace gossip poses a much greater danger: Rumors can ruin people's reputations and impact their personal, social and family lives. What's more, they can place the company at risk of litigation by affected parties who feel they have been harassed or discriminated against.

If the rumor concerns your work, it could even land you in court - and in jail: Careless gossip about upcoming initiatives, classified reports, or ongoing negotiations subjects your agency and others to serious business risk and can expose the rumor-mongers themselves to criminal proceedings for defamation or breach of confidentiality.

### Drawing the Line

Of course, there's nothing wrong with giggling over the kooky new furniture in the break room - or with whispering about the celebrities who were kissing at last night's Oscar awards. But here are a few questions to ask yourself before chatting with colleagues about the company or its associates:

- Is the information reliable? Or am I speculating and "embroidering" the facts?
- What could happen if the story spreads?
- Could someone be offended if they heard?
- Does the person spreading the rumor have a concealed motive?
- Do you want people to think of you as a gossip?

Engaging conversation and light banter can add fun to the office atmosphere and help us look forward to our workday. But remember: filing cabinets and cubicle walls have big ears. It's up to each of us to responsibly draw the line between harmless talk and dangerous gossip.